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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2670  
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

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STATE FOR NEA/MAG - HOPKINS, HARRIS AND NEA/ARN

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#) [SY](#) [SU](#) [TS](#)

SUBJECT: ARAB INTERIOR MINISTERS DISCUSS CT COOPERATION

REF: TUNIS 154 AND PREVIOUS (NOTAL)

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: The January 30-31 Arab League Interior Ministers meeting in Tunis was focused on counter-terrorism cooperation. Voicing support for Lebanon and Iraq, the Council of Arab Interior Ministers also discussed narcotics trafficking, civil protection and road safety. President Ben Ali's opening remarks, delivered by the Tunisian Minister of Interior, did not refer to recent security incidents in Tunisia (reftels) although he did suggest political asylum is exploited by terrorists. The local press also carried interviews with Sudanese and Syrian Interior Ministers. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) On January 30 and 31, 16 of the 22 Arab League countries sent delegates to the 24th annual Council of Arab Interior Ministers meeting in Tunis. Discussions focused on counter-terrorism cooperation, including combating transnational organized crime, terrorist financing and money laundering, and preventing terrorist organizations from obtaining chemical weapons. However, the final declaration contained no specific recommendations. The group called on member states to support police in Lebanon and Iraq and expressed its continued support for the Naif Arab Academy for Security Sciences. According to press reports, the following countries did not participate: Bahrain, the Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Lebanon, Palestine (due to travel restrictions imposed by Israel), and the United Arab Emirates. Somali Vice Prime Minister for Security Hussein Aideed attended, along with Arab Maghreb Union Secretary General Habib Ben Yahia, and UN Deputy Secretary General for Safety and Security David Veness.

¶3. (SBU) Tunisian Minister of Interior Rafik Belhaj Kacem delivered opening remarks attributed to Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. The speech did not mention recent domestic security events (reftels). Rather, Ben Ali obliquely criticized Western nations, saying international counter-terrorism cooperation should include "revising the provisions pertaining to the granting of political asylum." Ben Ali also called for a United Nations conference to adopt "an international anti-terrorism code of conduct."

¶4. (U) On the margins of the meeting, several Arab ministers gave interviews to the Tunisian press. On January 31, privately owned Arabic daily as-Sabah published an interview with Syrian Minister of Interior General Bassam Abdul Majid in which he stated that he had signed a memorandum of understanding related to counter-terrorism with his Iraqi counterpart Jawad al-Bulani. Abdul Majid said Syria is committed to "exerting all efforts" to achieve security and stability in Iraq, voicing support for the National Interest process, protecting the unity of Iraq and "solving" the militias. Abdul Majid said that Iraqi President Talabani's visit to Damascus had renewed cooperation between the two countries. The Syrian Minister added that Syria has always

supported the unity of Iraq's land and people, and its freedom and independence, and that he had confirmed to al-Bulani Syria's condemnation of all forms of terrorism that touch Iraqi citizens, establishments and infrastructure. Abdul Majid said cooperation did not require a written agreement. Rather, the memorandum of understanding, good intentions and joint work is the basis for cooperation, particularly as Syria ordered the closing of its borders to combat all those who try to infiltrate its borders toward Iraq for "hidden terrorist intentions."

15. (U) Sudanese Minister of Interior Zubeir Bashir Taha told local Arabic dailies as-Sabah and ash-Shourouq that Sudan "rejects the intervention of international forces and we have not changed our position." Regarding the African Union's refusal to elect Sudan president of the union in 2007, Taha said, "In January 2006 we hosted the AU Summit...and leaders agreed to support Sudan's presidency in 2007...but they didn't respect this agreement...which doesn't surprise us." On Darfur, Taha said, "The goal of colonialists is hegemony over the region and finding justifications to control the Darfur region since vast natural resources, including oil and gas, were discovered there." The Darfur problem, said Taha, can only be solved two ways: 1) Preventing the entrance of foreign weapons and munitions and 2) Strengthening economic resources, including water, so residents can benefit from this wealth.

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